


12-1964

A Century of Platonic Scholarship in France: From Cousin to Robin

Ernst Morris Manasse
North Carolina College at Durham

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp>

 Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), [Ancient Philosophy Commons](#), and the [History of Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Manasse, Ernst Morris, "A Century of Platonic Scholarship in France: From Cousin to Robin" (1964). *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*. 37.
<https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/37>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Manassah 1960

A CENTURY OF PLATONIC SCHOLARSHIP IN FRANCE: FROM COUSIN TO ROBIN

The history of modern Platonic scholarship in France begins with Victor Cousin.

Descartes, proud of the method which he had invented, had refused to acknowledge any indebtedness to ancient or mediæval predecessors. Yet already some of his immediate followers attempted to reconcile Cartesian thinking with earlier philosophical traditions. In this process an important role was played by members of the congregation of the Oratorians which was founded by Descartes' friend: the Cardinal Bérulle. The basis of the synthesis of the Oratorians was the Christian philosophy of St. Augustine and, just as Augustinianism had been one of the main channels of Platonic and Neo-platonic thought in the Middle Ages, it played a similar role in the writings of the Oratorians. Some of the most sympathetic and most original examinations of Plato's philosophy in 17th century France were made by members of this congregation, while the Jesuits frequently rejected Platonism and defended the Aristotelianism of the scholastics.

The paramount problem for the Oratorians as well as for other Catholic thinkers--such as Bossuet--who were attracted by Plato, was to point out the agreement of the Platonic philosophy with basic doctrines of the Church. The growth of secularism in the 18th century reduced the importance of this problem considerably. But only in exceptional cases did secularism promote an independent study of Plato. The main trends of 18th century philosophy were hostile to transcendentalism. It became a custom to call Plato's philosophy chimerical.

Cousin's significance is due to his extra-ordinary sensitivity to intellectual currents. In the early years of the Restoration period, Mme. de Staël directed the attention of the French public toward the recent events in the intellectual life of Germany. Cousin, who had been first attracted by Scotch thinkers like Reid, soon sensed the greater power of Kant and the post-Kantian idealists. I have to deal briefly with a difficult and controversial subject. It seems to me evident that the young Cousin was deeply attracted by the speculations of Schelling and Hegel and that, at the first contact, he responded like a congenial disciple. In 1817, 1818 and 1824, Cousin visited Germany. He visited Goethe; he had long and intimate discussions with both Schelling and Hegel as well as with Creuzer, Bekker, Brandis and others; he also met Schleiermacher. After his return to France he remained in contact with many of these persons.

In the earlier years of his career Cousin freely acknowledged his indebtedness to Germany. Later he became more hesitant to do so. One of his biographers suggests that Cousin owed much to German philological and historical scholarship but little to German philosophy. I do not believe that one can separate the two, and Cousin's merits about Plato seem to me to confirm this view.

There are two outstanding projects to which Cousin was induced by his German friends. One was an edition of writings of Proclus which had not been edited before; this was suggested to him by Creuzer; the other was a French translation of Plato's works after the model of Schleiermacher's enterprise; this was suggested to him by Brandis.

Cousin's Plato translation, like the translations of Schleiermacher and of Jowett, constituted an important step in calling Plato to the attention of both scholars and the general reading public. He had planned to write a general introduction to the translation, but this plan was not carried out. There are, however, individual introductions to the first volumes and notes to justify doubtful translations.

The introductions vary in scope and do not convey a comprehensive picture of the Platonic philosophy. But they show that, after isolated endeavors in the eighteenth century, France through Cousin became a partner in the systematic exploration of ancient philosophy which had started in Germany about the turn of the century. Cousin also formulated a philosophy of history which, compared with schemes of Schelling and Hegel, appears to be rather primitive. He called his doctrine eclecticism. Assuming that every significant philosophical position had been developed in the past, he maintained that there were but four basic types of philosophy. Each position was justified in its positive claims but was wrong in the exclusion of the others. Eclecticism would combine the truths of all, avoiding their intolerance.

In spite of its claim, Cousin's eclecticism is biased against the materialism and sensualism of the preceding age. It is a spiritualistic eclecticism. As many French thinkers of the 19th century he expressed greatest admiration for Leibniz.

The eclectic Cousin asserted that his point of departure was psychological observation and that he was led by induction from the analysis of the psychological facts to the existence of God who is the necessary cause of the contingent world. Yet without any consistency the spiritualist Cousin characterized the relation of the world to God as that of a copy to its model or as the realization of the eternal essences contained in him.

This spiritualist Cousin considered himself as a Platonist. In an essay on "The Language and the Doctrine of Ideas" Cousin maintained that Plato had made the following distinctions: There is an idea of the absolute ($\epsilonἶδος \alphaὐτὸ καὶ ἄτομον$) without any relation to the world. This idea dwells in absolute reason, the $\thetaετος λόγος$. But this idea is not only essence but also cause and enters into motion. It thus ceases to be absolute and becomes $ἰδέα$ in the human mind and $εἶδος$ in nature. Cousin adds that these ideas live on in modern philosophy. They are Leibniz' eternal truths the ultimate basis of which is the supreme and universal spirit which cannot fail to exist.

Cousin once said: "I have had many masters. Leibniz was perhaps the greatest, but the most amiable and the dearest

to whom I am attached most closely is Plato." But Plato, himself as the above quotation shows, was understood by him as a spiritualist like Leibniz and the Neo-platonists.

In his later years, Cousin tried to show that Platonic idealism is the true tradition of French philosophy since Descartes. "The concept of the infinite to Descartes means the same as the universal, i.e. the idea, means to Plato." Malebranche, Bossuet, Fénelon, he asserts, belong to the same tradition. "Bossuet quotes St. Augustine, he quotes Plato himself, he defends him from the outset against those who convert the Platonic ideas into some being that subsists by itself, whereas in reality they only exist in the mind of God." (Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien). Here it is evident that Cousin's Platonism in the end was a revival of Augustinianism. For half a century this eclectic Augustinianism became the dominant trend among French interpreters of the Platonic philosophy, even though there were a few powerful dissenters.

For the year 1833 the Academie des Sciences Morales et Politiques had announced a prize for the best essay on the Metaphysics of Aristotle. On the suggestion of Cousin the first prize was split between the German scholar Michelet and the young Frenchman Ravaisson. Cousin had not been partial to Plato in the sense that he should have played out Plato against Aristotle. Ravaisson was a fervent Aristotelian who in his work tried to point out the superiority of the Stagirite over his master.

Ravaisson was deeply influenced by Maine de Biran and by Schelling and he shared the latter's hostility to Hegel. It seems that he believed that there was a far reaching similarity between Hegel and Cousin and again between Hegel and Plato. Thus it is likely that his analysis of the Platonic philosophy reflects his conception of those whom he considered as Plato's modern successors, i. e. Hegel and Cousin. However that may be, for the history of the Platonic studies in France it is relevant that Ravaisson included in his work on Aristotle a lengthy discussion of the Platonic philosophy and that this discussion was unsympathetic toward Plato.

Ravaisson's work on Aristotle's Metaphysics is a major event in the history of classical scholarship. French Platonists felt the challenge to counter it with a positive work on Plato of equal import. I believe that no work met the challenge before Leon Robin's book on Plato's Doctrine of Numbers and Ideas that appeared 1908.

Ravaisson objects to the Platonic philosophy, because he thinks it is a purely abstract doctrine and that instead of leading toward reality it leads away from it. His criticism is directed both against Plato's dialectics and against the theory of ideas.

Ravaisson's concept of dialectics depends on Aristotle's use of the term. Dialectics is a method to dissolve sophisms

but scarcely transcends the level of sophistic argument itself. What is worse, it is the purpose of this dialectics "to re-discover an element of generality in the individual existences and to reduce the sensible diversity to the rational unity of the universal." Yet Plato's tendency toward abstraction founders, when it looks for a supreme unity, for "there is no genus which simultaneously comprises all objects of thought, all categories of existence." A meaningful logical order presupposes concepts that are adapted to the particular forms of being instead of abstractions which are emptied of every content. The theory of ideas is an ontology based on dialectical abstraction and leads to a meaningless duplication of reality.

The starting point of Ravaisson's own philosophy is the self-consciousness of the active soul which never simply cognizes but which simultaneously thinks, loves, acts and infuses life, thought, love and creativity into nature. It is within this context that he renewed Aristotle's arguments against the theory of ideas. The resulting picture of Plato's abstractionism is obviously but a caricature, yet this caricature was so forcefully drawn that French Platonists for many years were at pains to point out its distortions.

As most of these apologies of Plato originated in the school of Cousin, it was for their authors even more disturbing when a heresy started in their own midst. In 1841, i.e. four years after the appearance of the first volume of Ravaisson's Aristotle in its final shape, T. Henri Martin published a critical text, a translation and a commentary on the Timaeus in two volumes. In this work, which was dedicated to Cousin, the author attacked the very foundation of the eclectic Platonism, i.e. the Augustinian view which placed the ideas in the divine mind. In his own thinking, Martin was a spiritualist and he maintained with much conviction that there is but one substance which is God and that, accordingly, there is no separate existence of ideas outside of him. But Martin was just as definite in asserting that this view which he personally defended was not the doctrine of Plato. Plato indeed considered the ideas as independent entities. Martin does not conceal his disappointment about this fact, as, otherwise, he is full of admiration for Plato and defends him against Ravaisson. If, for instance, the latter had echoed Aristotle's charge that Plato was ignorant of the concept of the final cause, Martin argues that in spite of Plato's failure to create a consistent philosophical system which made it, e. g., impossible to determine the relation of the demiurg to the idea of the good, certain passages of the Republic definitely suggest that the idea of the good exercises the function of a final cause. Aristotle, he charges, used to prefer those interpretations of the words of his teacher which were most open to criticism.

Martin lacks the philosophical originality which makes Ravaisson one of the important thinkers of the nineteenth century, but he surpasses Ravaisson (at least the Ravaisson of the

book on Aristotle) in scholarship and in the art of interpretation. He is thoroughly familiar both with the ancient authors and with the modern, especially the German critics. Combining scholarship with sound judgment he created a new type of a commentary and one of the most solid pieces of Platonic research of the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately the representatives of the eclectic school did not recognize the superiority of Martin's achievement. Their response to it was prejudiced by their conviction that the denial of the Augustinian doctrine that the Platonic ideas were the thoughts of God was little less than treason. They were therefore faced with the double task: on the one hand to refute Ravaisson's thesis that the ideas are mere abstractions and on the other hand to disprove Martin's assertion that Plato believed in an independent existence of the ideas.

To be sure, the first attack on Ravaisson's Plato interpretation had been launched before the appearance of Martin's commentary. It was contained in a small volume with the title Etudes sur la Theodicée de Platon et d'Aristote (1840), that had been written by Cousin's student Jules Simon. Against Ravaisson's claim that the Platonic ideas are products of empty generalizations, Simon maintained that ideas are discovered when true being is distinguished from the pseudo-reality of sensible things. The soul which chooses the path of dialectics is not engaged in an empty game but follows the object of its love and this love cannot end but in the infinite. Ideas are "intelligibles," and as sensible things need an extended space for their pseudo-reality, the reality of the intelligibles presupposes the existence of an intelligence which conceives them.

Plato's theodicy follows from his view that God does not only think himself--as Aristotle assumes--but that he thinks the ideas. Therefore Plato's God is both a final and an efficient cause. "If one wishes to rise to the almighty God creator of the Christians, one has to decide for one of the two sides: either one accepts the doctrine of the ideas and Plato's theodicy which follows from it or one rejects the doctrine of ideas and accepts Aristotle's views on God's activity" (i.e. that God is only the final but not the efficient cause).

The most devoted and the most loyal of Cousin's disciples was Paul Janet. In 1848 he was promoted with an Essai sur la dialectique de Platon which was published in 1861 together with two other essays under the title Etudes sur la dialectique dans Hegel. Janet "defends" Plato both against Ravaisson and against Martin. Socrates' dialectics had consisted of both the ironic destruction of sophistic arguments and of majeutics. Likewise the Platonic dialectics had not only--as Ravaisson believed--a negative but also a positive function. Janet places the emphasis on the ascending dialectics, as it is the ultimate objective of the eclectic Platonism to assure the

connection of all being with God. It is however impossible to ascend by generalization and abstraction. To see that this was not Plato's understanding of the ascent it is sufficient to remember his interpretation of the ascent as the progress of love. Would any one love mere abstractions?

The same conclusion follows from Plato's theory of recollection. The beginning of recollection is sense perception, its end is the full awareness of a reality which in some way corresponds to the initial perception but which is infinitely superior to it. Generalization starts from the observation of what the appearances have in common, recollection is occasioned by their contradictions to which it opposes the pure ideas. Every step toward the general concept means a loss of being, every step of the dialectical ascent is an enrichment. Recollection means that we do not discover that which is but that we are naturally related to it. Though it looks as if there are many steps in the dialectical process, the decisive transition is immediate. "There is an immediate transition from the shadow-like day of reality to the pure day of being."

Janet's insistence on recollection against Ravaisson's equation of dialectics with generalization is much better founded than his polemics against Martin. He inexactly quotes Republic 517 C ἀγαθὸν ἡ ἀλήθεια ὁρῶντων τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἄνθρωπον leaving out the word πᾶσι and explains: "If the idea of the good is the cause of all good and beautiful things, then it is the cause of the ideas which are the best and the most beautiful which exists. It creates truth and intelligence--but where are truth and intelligence if not in the ideas? It grants to them being and light. Thus they are nothing except in relation to this idea. They are modi whose substance is the idea of the good."

Janet's enthusiasm for Plato was modified when he later became a historian of political philosophy and as a liberal was repelled by several of Plato's political ideas. This belongs to a different topic.

The most ambitious effort of the eclectic-spiritualistic school to furnish a comprehensive interpretation of the Platonic philosophy was Alfred Fouillée's La Philosophie de Platon which appeared in two volumes in 1869. But even this work did not achieve for Plato what Ravaisson had achieved for Aristotle. Like most spiritualistic thinkers Fouillée greatly admired Leibniz. He also repeatedly referred to Hegel. But the time had already passed when a spiritualistic work could claim a representative place. The author himself was soon to distantiate himself from the position which he had taken in this work.

Fouillée writes: "Plato will admit that everything participates in thought; with the latter concept he will however first understand the object of thought, the intelligible. Later he will recognize that to the intelligible corresponds an intelligence and at this point it will become true, again, that

everything participates in thought; but now it is the divine thought where subject and object, the intelligible and the intelligence, are re-traced to identity, embrace existence and knowledge and thus make mutual participation possible." The sequence of this thinking still reflects Cousin's transition from psychology to ontology.

Asserting that Plato "proved" the doctrine of ideas and listing the arguments as they were reported by Aristotle, Fouillee mainly pursues the "one over the many." Emphasizing the significance of the Parmenides (as against the Timaeus) Fouillee claims that Plato looks for middle terms (moyens termes) whenever he is confronted with opposites as these middle terms represent the unison of the extremes. In the end the search for the unifying principle leads to the supreme one which embraces all ideas potentially. On the other hand there cannot be an absolute division between ideas and material things, since then ideas would only be known by the divine mind and material things only by men (Parm 132 f). Fouillee concludes that the doctrine of participation as developed in the Parmenides and the Sophist entirely obliterates the chorismos between the two realms--an opinion which was to be shared by scholars who otherwise had little in common with the spiritualistic interpretation.

In the last part of his work, Fouillee draws several conclusions about the unexpressed assumptions of the Platonic philosophy. The highest principle, underlying Plato's thought is, according to this interpreter, the faith in the rationality of being and in its universal intelligibility. He calls this a synthetic principle. Not being demonstrable, the belief in the intelligibility of being is an act of our will, our freedom. Fouillee maintains, however, that our freedom must choose this faith, because it represents the good, the love-worthy. "Plato seems to have understood that the act of the metaphysical faith in the idea of ideas is a moral deed of love. To believe in the good is not only reasonable, it is even good."

Fouillee's use of the terms: will, freedom, choice, the distinction between what is known and what is to be assumed suggests that even at the time when he wrote his book on Plato, he had already absorbed other philosophical currents beside the eclectic spiritualism. It is probably due to such influences that his enthusiasm for Plato soon gave way to a more reserved attitude and even to sharp criticism. In his later History of Philosophy he reproaches Plato for having presented his metaphysical speculations as knowledge and not as poetic hypotheses. Plato's God now appears to him as an ideal whose existence has not been demonstrated. What is worse, this unproven God is perfection and not goodness, and Plato's ethics ignores the personal will, human freedom and benevolence.

Fouillee's personal development reflects a change in the intellectual climate of France. About the middle of the nineteenth century the philosophical scene had been entered by two philosophers neither of whom had been a student at the

Université or the Ecole Normale or was ever to hold a chair of philosophy; Auguste Comte and Charles Renouvier. In the case of Comte, the influence of his philosophy, too, was most strongly felt outside the universities, but Renouvier, since about 1870, exercised a strong influence on the thinking of the younger teachers of philosophy. Even more important for the present context is the fact that Comte had little to say about Plato--and that little was critical if not hostile--and that Renouvier had early presented a thoughtful interpretation of Plato's philosophy in a Manual of Ancient Philosophy (1842). But the decisive turn of Renouvier's thought took place in the years following the publication of the Manual. He now became a decided opponent of eclecticism and called his new endeavor criticism, thus indicating that he wanted to renew and to continue the work of Kant.

The given material from which Renouvier's analysis started was called by him representation and this he took both as process and as product. But instead of an induction from psychology to ontology, Renouvier insisted on a rigorous logical analysis. After the model of Kant but with important modifications, Renouvier put up a table of categories with "relation" taking the place of a basic category. Like Kant he referred the categories to the forms of judgment. Every judgment involves composition and decomposition (synthesis and analysis). In the judgment "A is B," A and B are differentiated as two concepts which have their own definitions. The copula on the other hand shows that there is something common between the two and so, from a certain point of view they are also identified. "Thus the positing of the relation . . . brings about a determination in that it differentiates and distinguishes. Whence it follows that relation . . . is a synthesis of the other and the same." (Traité de Logique Générale, 2nd ed., p. 148)

It seems to me probable that in this analysis Renouvier was consciously or unconsciously influenced by Plato's discussion of the "most important Forms" in the Sophist which he himself had analyzed in the Manual, and that this analysis, in turn, was to influence both Fouillée's and Brochard's interpretations of Plato's dialectics. But Renouvier's criticism excluded any ontological conclusion from the content of our consciousness to a divine mind. There is no legitimate passing from Renouvier's criticism to the Augustinianism of the eclectics. Fouillée in his work on Plato disregarded Renouvier's caveat whereas for Brochard and the later interpreters Augustinianism was a doctrine of the past.

The center of Renouvier's philosophy is the consciousness of freedom. As far as the judgment is concerned he maintained that only freedom makes it possible to distinguish truth from error. For the determinist, truth and error are equally necessary. Freedom, on the other hand means the possibility to doubt and to subject our judgment to reason instead of the affections.

"Error is freedom!" Deeply impressed by the teachings of Renouvier, Victor Brochard, in his early book On Error (1879) discussed the theories of error of Plato, Descartes and Spinoza. Descartes is closest to his own voluntarism, Spinoza is farthest away from it. Plato stands between the two. Analyzing the pertinent passages of the Theaetetus and the Sophist, Brochard praises Plato for having recognized that error is not located in the object but in the judgment and that it is a synthesis. This means, he asserts, that error is not only the absence of truth but is something positive that is differant from the truth. But the difference between truth and error is derived by Plato from the idea of the good, and the idea of the good is only an idea. Plato's intellectualism fails to see that error presupposes an "active spontaneity," in order that it can deviate from the truth. For "the existence whereby the possible differs from the real is not itself idea or intelligence but is will." (p. 41)

Brochard's next and his most accomplished book was the famous Les Sceptiques Grecs (1887). This work shows that Brochard was not only greatly indebted to the philosophy of Renouvier (in this book again he develops a thesis of his master) but that he had also absorbed and fully mastered the methodological advances in the interpretation of ancient philosophy that had been made by German scholars. The year 1870 brought about a profound change in the attitude of French intellectuals toward Germany. It finally destroyed the image created by Mme. de Staël of a nation which only aspired to excel by its philosophy and poetry. On the other hand it challenged French scholars to show that they were second to none in those fields in which Germany had played a leading role. Brochard's book on the ancient sceptics is but one of the successful answers to this challenge.

For Brochard himself, his study of one of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy resulted in a new conception of the character of ancient philosophy which also influenced his understanding of the Platonic philosophy. This conception is evident from a number of essays in which he pointed out that (1) the ethics of the eclectics was greatly dependent on Kant's moral philosophy, especially in its insistence on duty; (2) that Kant's concept of duty is basically not a philosophical but a religious concept, reflecting the biblical notion of a God who makes commandments; that a genuine philosophical ethics, as exemplified by the true Greek philosophy, is eudaemonistic. Within the context of Plato's ethics, Brochard is mainly interested in the theory of pleasure. Plato (like Aristotle) is for him an advocate of metriopatheia which he personally preferred to the rigorism of Stoic apatheia. In other words, Brochard does not try so much to understand Plato on the background of his predecessors as he comprehends him on the basis of a general concept of ancient philosophy which reflects Hellenistic attitudes along with ancient Hellenic ones. This concept of ancient philosophy is opposed both to the eclectic ethics with its

insistence on duty and the categorical imperative and to the claim that the eclectic ethics is fundamentally identical with Plato's.

Discussing Plato's dialectics, Brochard was deeply aware of the intellectual effort which was needed to overcome the logical rigorism of Parmenides. It was certainly paradoxical to recognize the being of non-being, and in doing so Plato did not proceed logically but dialectically; i.e. he first analyzed the difficulties of being itself. At this point it was decisive which objections he recognized and which he ignored. "Plato recognizes that his demonstration is not quite satisfactory. He knows well how much distortion and violence it includes, but he accepts this and waits that some one refutes him; nobody has tried it as yet." (Etudes, p. 135)

Again one may recognize Renouvier's influence in this appreciation of Plato's solution as deliberate choice. The same influence is recognizable at still another place, though in this instance one must perhaps add the influence of Brochard's friend and colleague Hamelin who, starting from Renouvier's categories of representation, developed a new idealistic system with features that are reminiscent of Fichte and of Hegel. Renouvier had stated that judgment is synthesis, and synthesis was to become the symbol of the true philosophy. Synthetical thinking as opposed to sterile analysis characterizes a method which not only unfolds what is implied in a concept but which, by dialectical progression, leads to new insights. Brochard considers Plato's dialectics as synthetical in contrast to Aristotle's syllogistics which is based on the principle of identity. But "the numerous objections of Aristotle against the Platonic method must not make us fail to recognize its originality and its boldness."

If Platonic dialectics includes ascent and descent, the spiritualistic (Augustinian) interpretation seems to have been mainly interested in the ascent which would ultimately lead to God. The syntehtic interpretation, on the other hand, tends to emphasize the descending dialectics.

In spite of Brochard's break with the Augustinian spiritualism, his interpretation of Plato has been called neo-platonic, and the critic who expressed this view was Emile Bréhier. No doubt, Brochard himself would have rejected that epithet, as he considered Neo-platonism as the first intrusion of oriental religious thinking into the philosophical tradition of the West. But although Brochard defended the independence and the eternity of the ideas, he thought that the theory of the participation provided a bridge between the ideas and the world of becoming, and he concluded, like Fouillée, that in the end the chorismos between the two worlds would disappear. It belongs to the same context when he writes: "It is one of the characteristic features of the Platonic method that it everywhere multiplies the intermediaries, the middle

he does not proceed naively but explains that from Aristotle we can learn how Plato was understood in his epoch. It is true that, simultaneously with the work on the theory of ideas and numbers, Robin published a shorter book on Plato's philosophy of love in which he interpreted passages from the Platonic dialogues and that he did likewise, in several subsequent books and essays. But according to his methodological principles, he used the views which he had obtained from Aristotle as the basis for the interpretation of the Platonic text. Was the attempt to recover the way in which Plato was understood by his contemporaries successful? I think that Robin's dependence on Hamelin's idealism makes his interpretation much more modern than he would allow. But he also had to admit that Aristotle was an unreliable and unsympathetic reporter of Plato's views. Far from accepting Aristotle's testimony, he constantly conjectures what must have been the source of Aristotle's misrepresentations.

Robin is a Platonist. If Ravaisson had pictured Plato as the sterile abstracter and had contrasted his thought with the positive philosophy of Aristotle, for Robin the picture is reversed. In his view, Aristotle is the abstract thinker, only that he says analytic instead of abstract and contrasts the sterile analytical approach with Plato's synthetic synthetism.

According to Robin, Plato conceived of a hierarchy of numerous levels of being, in which the higher progresses to the lower. At the highest level are the principles of the One and the indefinite dyad. The first generation, i.e. synthesis, of the two brings forth the ideal numbers of the decad. The next level is represented by the ideal figures, i.e. the ideal non-spatial models of space, direction, line, triangle and body. "They are the models in the order of magnitude just as the numbers are the model of every relation in general." Ideal numbers and figures stand above the ideas which are arranged as genders and species. Robin thinks that it was likely that Plato even began to contemplate ideas of individuals. As the numbers, the ideas have been generated by the One and the dyad and are therefore, logically, not eternal.

Whereas the ideas are, so to say, stationary points in the infinite, contingent material things never rest. Yet there is organization even among them. There are two kinds of intermediaries which enable the ideas to influence the material world causally. The transformation of the indivisible into the spatially divisible is mediated by the "mathematical" numbers and magnitudes. But there is another intermediary "which makes it possible for us to understand how the material world presents a harmonic whole and is accessible to our power of cognition." This intermediary is the motoric and cognitive world soul, "a mixture in which the intelligible and the sensible are combined." (*La Théorie. . .*, p. 593) There is, however, also movement in the ideas themselves. For as the dyad in the generation of the ideas appears as non-being, some sort of becoming enters into their formation.

terms, and this to such an extent that it leads in a continuous way from one part to another and ultimately includes everything. Furthermore these intermediaries are traced back to the unity, because they are all subject to a mathematics which preserves the unity in the multiplicity by means of the proportion." (Etudes, p. 52)

After Cousin, Brochard is the second initiator of Platonic studies in France. As time does not permit to follow up his influence, I limit the discussion to a few remarks on two of his most eminent disciples: Auguste Diès and Léon Robin.

Diès devoted a long life to the study of Plato and became one of Plato's most competent interpreters. Among the followers of Brochard he was least attracted by the "Neo-platonic" interpretations. Diès, too, is fully aware of the significance of the participation or, as he also says, relation, but the important point for him is that, due to the universality of relation, none of the ideas (Forms) is isolated. Besides, the insistence on being qua participation must not make us forget that there is also a discussion of being qua being.

The central concept in Plato's ontology is for Diès τὸ πᾶν τε αὖς ὅν which he interprets as fulness of being and which appears to him Plato's purest expression of the divine. A faithful Catholic, Diès is free from any dogmatic prejudice. He occasionally refers to Fénelon and Malebranche, but not in order to approach Plato to Christianity. Plato's greatest merit lies for him in his fight against intellectual, moral and political relativism. That which is not relative is divine and the most divine, for Plato, is being. Plato did not identify the divine with God who is ontologically later (but did not emanate from it). Plato prepared the path for Christianity, but his philosophy is in important aspects different from Christian thinking.

In contrast to Diès, Léon Robin continued the Neo-platonic trend which was present in Brochard and led it to its climax. What had been the desideratum since the appearance of Ravaisson's work on Aristotle, the great monograph on Plato seems to have been accomplished by Robin with his book Plato's Theory of Ideas and Numbers according to Aristotle (1908).

Robin is equally attached to Brochard and to Hamelin. Philosophically, it is the latter's concept of a synthetic philosophy which exercised a formative influence on his thinking. Still Brochard, too, had made use of that concept; he, too, had emphasized the descending dialectics and the middle terms which, he thought, closed the gap between the ideas and the things subject to becoming.

Ravaisson had drawn a picture of the Platonic philosophy that was entirely derived from Aristotle's information about Plato. Robin, in his great book, does exactly the same, though

Toward the end of his book, Robin states his surprise about the similarity of the picture of the Platonic philosophy which results from his labor with that of the ancient Neo-platonists. But Neo-platonism appeared to be present already in Brochard, even though his Neo-Platonism had replaced the Augustinian Neo-platonism of Cousin and the spirutualists.

Among the authors that have been mentioned neither Martin nor Dies ascribed Neo-platonic views to Plato, and Brochard's interpretations are too independent and too complex to fit any classification. Also it appeared that two philosophical movements, i.e. the German idealism and Renouvier's neo-criticism initiated two distinct phases in French Plato interpretation in the century from Cousin to Robin. It is the more surprising that Neo-platonism played such an important role during the whole period.

Ernst Moritz Manasse
North Carolina College at Durham